Secondary History Teachers and Inclusion of Students with Disabilities: An Exploratory Study

Stephanie D. van Hover, University of Virginia
Elizabeth A. Yeager; University of Florida

Abstract

This exploratory study examines secondary history teachers' views and attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the secondary history classroom. The researchers interviewed twelve teachers, asking questions addressing: general background information of participants, teachers' instructional approaches and curriculum development, teachers' views about students with disabilities and inclusion, adaptations made for students with disabilities, and contextual supports available for teachers. Four major themes emerged from the interview data: teachers' instructional approaches and curriculum development, adaptations for students with disabilities, teacher views towards students with disabilities, and contextual support available for general education teachers. Teachers viewed history instruction, curriculum, and assessment as standard for all children, regardless of ability level. Teachers made very superficial changes to assignments rather than truly "adapting" assignments or instructional approaches. Several teachers expressed hostility towards the concept of inclusion and argued that students with learning difficulties should not be in the mainstream content-area classroom. The interview data revealed the lack of preparation of history teachers for teaching students with disabilities. Finally, the issue of contextual support arose in the interview data. Implications for social studies education are discussed.

Introduction

Inclusion of students with mild disabilities in general education classes is becoming more prevalent (Winn & Blanton, 1997). Within the special education community, however, researchers continue to debate about the proper extent of inclusion (e.g. Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Lipsky and Gartner, 1996a). Proponents of full inclusion call for the provision of services to students with disabilities (including those with severe impairments) in the neighborhood school in age-appropriate general education classes with the necessary support services (Lipsky and Gartner, 1996b). Other researchers emphasize the importance of maintaining a continuum of services (for example, resource rooms and pull-out) and assert that full-time general education placement for all students denies students with disabilities the individualized, special education supports they need (e.g., Schumm and Vaughn, 1995; Zigmond and Baker, 1995, 1996). Additionally, these researchers question whether "special education" can occur within the general education environment and define "special education" as specific, directed, individualized, intensive, remedial instruction of students who are clearly deficient academically and struggling with the schoolwork they are being given (i.e., Hallahan and Kauffman, 2000; Zigmond and Baker, 1995).

Nonetheless, full inclusion is being implemented in many schools across the country. As a result, many special education researchers have begun to examine the success of inclusion, as well as attitudes and beliefs of general education teachers towards students with disabilities mainstreamed in their general education classroom (i.e., Schumm, Vaughn, Gordon and Rothlein, 1994; Soodak, Podell, and Lehman, 1998). According to this research, certain factors contribute to successful inclusion, including: meaningful adaptations to instruction and curriculum that differentiate and individualize instruction for students with disabilities, positive teacher beliefs and attitudes towards inclusion and students with disabilities, and contextual support for general education teachers (i.e., Houck and Rogers, 1994, Lipsky and Gartner, 1996). However, some research has also shown that general education teachers may attempt to meet the needs of students with disabilities but often feel ill-prepared to do so, are constrained by their standardized view of instruction and curriculum, believe that mainstreamed students should enter content-area classes ready to learn the same material at the same level of other students, and do not make any significant changes to their curriculum development or instructional approaches (i.e., Schumm and Vaughn, 1992; Soodak, et. al, 1998).

Students included in the general education classroom could be identified by their school district as having learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorders, emotional or behavior disorders, communication disorders, hearing impairments, visual impairments, and/or physical disabilities. Students with disabilities could experience problems reading, writing, math, spoken language, attention, memory and cognition, social-emotional, motivation, and meta-cognition (Hallahan and Kauffman, 2001). Although impossible to generalize across disabilities, students included in the general education classroom typically require meaningful curricular and instructional accommodations and adaptations in order to succeed academically. Nowacek (2001) describes an accommodation as "a modification to the delivery of instruction or method of student performance that does not significantly change the content or conceptual difficulty of the curriculum;" adaptations extend beyond accommodations and involve changing "the content or conceptual difficulty of the curriculum" (p. 196). Additionally, special educators argue that the success of students with disabilities requires teachers to differentiate curriculum, provide a framework for learning, intensively model learning processes and strategies, present information in multiple ways, allow students to demonstrate learning in multiple ways, teach students to use memory strategies, teach self-regulation and self-monitoring, provide opportunities for extended practice and application, and adjust work load and time requirements (Vaughn, Bos, and Schumm, 2000). Special educators argue that "differentiating curriculum" involves planning for the success of all students in the class and explicitly establishing goals for the range of student ability by considering what some students will learn, what most but not all students will learn, and what all students will learn (Vaughn, Bos, and Schumm, 2000).

Inclusion presents numerous challenges for social studies educators. And while the move towards full inclusion of students with disabilities has generated a great deal of special education research on general education teachers, little to no research currently exists specifically focusing on how secondary history teachers view and react to the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classroom. Curtis (1991) conducted a review of the literature on special education and social studies, but the majority of the 39 research studies discussed focused on self-contained special education classes. Passe and Beattie (1994) conducted a survey of 142 social studies teachers in West Virginia, New York, New Mexico, Virginia, and Texas that examined the types of adaptations used with students with mild disabilities, constraints faced implementing adaptations, and the general nature of achievement of students in the social studies classroom. They found that social studies teachers generally used peer tutoring, special seating arrangements, adult tutoring, alternative assignments, alternative reading materials, ability grouping, alternate evaluation, and audiovisual supplements. Insufficient time, materials, and uncertainty about how to provide for the needs of students with mild disabilities precluded teachers from making more significant adaptations. Several other recent articles have addressed different instructional ideas for social studies teachers teaching students with disabilities (i.e., Friend and Bursuck, 1996; Guerin, 1992; McFarland, 1998; Porter, 1995). On the whole, however, this issue has received little attention in social studies research.

As the number of students with disabilities in general education settings increases (Katsiyannis et al., 1995; U.S. Department of Education, 1996), it becomes imperative that social studies educators possess the ability to create interesting, engaging, and educationally responsive environments for all students (McGregor and Vogelsberg, 1998). The roles, skills, and attitudes of teachers plays a central role in successful inclusion of students. Thus, in order for teacher educators to better prepare future teachers capable of accommodating the needs of diverse learners in the history classroom, more information about how history teachers view inclusion is necessary. Therefore, this study is an exploratory examination of secondary history teachers' views and attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the secondary history classroom.

Methods and Data Sources

The data source for this study is a set of 12 interviews. The researchers developed an interview protocol of eleven questions addressing the following areas: general background information of participants, teachers' instructional approaches and curriculum development, teachers' views about students with disabilities and inclusion, adaptations made

for students with disabilities, and contextual supports available for teachers. The sample for the study included twelve (12) volunteers: seven (7) high school and five (5) middle school American history teachers. The researchers invited volunteers from all secondary public schools located in a school district in North Central Florida.

In this county, students identified by the school district as having mild and moderate learning disabilities, emotional disorders, physical disabilities, and attention disorders are placed in general education settings for all or part of the school day. Students identified as severely disabled remain in full-time special education or separate learning centers. All of the teachers in our study had 5 or more special education students included in their classes. All students with a disability included in a general education setting have a written individualized education program (IEP), developed by a team of professionals and the parents. The IEP includes "levels of functioning, long- and short- term goals, extent to which the student will not participate in the general education classroom and curriculum, services to be provided, plans for initiating and evaluating the services, and needed transition services" (Hallahan and Kauffman, 2000, p. 29). Additionally, in the state of Florida, students identified with physical or mental disabilities who do not meet the eligibility criteria for Special Education services but do require accommodations receive 504 Plans (Florida Department of Education, 1999, p. 6). These students typically include children identified with attention deficit disorder (ADD).

Of the seven middle schools in the district, five agreed to participate in the study. Teachers are identified by number and teaching level (M for middle school). The teacher volunteers included two white males, one white female, one African-American female, and one African-American male. Teaching experience of the middle school teachers ranged from 2 –22 years. Four of the five teachers had a bachelor's degree in history (M-1,2,4,5), 1 of the teachers had a bachelor's degree in public relations (M-3), and 2 of the 5 had a master's degree in social studies education. Three of the five teachers had taken a special education course. (For a breakdown of information by teacher, see Table 1).

Of the eight high schools in the district, seven agreed to participate in the study. The high school teacher volunteers included four white males, two white females, and one African-American female. Teachers are identified by number and teaching level (H for high school). Teaching experience among the high school teachers ranged from 1-40 years. In terms of educational background, 6 of the 7 teachers had a bachelor's degree in history (H-1,2,4,5,6,7), 1 teacher had a bachelor's degree in business economics, 2 of the 7 had master's degrees in social studies education (H-5,7), 2 of the 7 had specialist's degrees in social studies education (H-1,2), and 1 teacher had a doctorate in curriculum and instruction (H-6). Three of the seven teachers had taken a special education course. (For a breakdown of this information by teacher, see Table 2).

The interviews, conducted by the first researcher in spring 2000, took place in the teachers' classrooms during their planning period or after school. Interviews lasted about one hour each and were audio-taped and transcribed, resulting in 72 pages of transcripts. The 12 transcribed interviews were analyzed by the researchers in three phases. First, the researcher who conducted the interviews read through the interview data searching for patterns and relationships, developed codes and domains, and coded the interviews (Spradley, 1980; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Secondly, the codes were member checked by the second researcher, who detailed her impressions in a research memo. Finally, the two researchers met to compare and contrast data and draw conclusions from the codes and interviews.

Findings

Four major themes emerged from the interview data: teachers' instructional approaches and curriculum development, adaptations for students with disabilities, teacher views towards students with disabilities, and contextual support available for general education teachers.

Teachers' instructional approach and curriculum development

The five middle school history teachers described a variety of instructional approaches to teaching history, including lecture, textbooks, worksheets, group work, projects, use of multiple sources of information, and research assignments. Teachers M-1 and M-2 asserted that they used a variety of teaching methods, activities, and sources. Both stated that they

tried to be creative and make a conscious effort to incorporate higher-order thinking activities into their social studies classes. Teacher M-3 noted that he struggled to find instructional activities that interested his low-performing students; he relied on the textbook, created his own worksheets, and tried to incorporate current events discussion in his classroom. Teacher M-4 occasionally used cooperative learning activities but preferred teacher-centered lecture; he stated, "I have the most success when I'm up there talking, lecturing. I like teacher-centered instruction". He did, however, note that he tried to incorporate multiple perspectives on historical events into his lecture as well as a variety of primary sources. Teacher M-5 stated that he relied on the textbook, asked students to read 4-5 pages a night, and used lecture, note taking, and discussion. He used the mnemonic "RSU" in his classroom – read, study, and understand. In terms of curriculum development, all of the middle school teachers reported that they relied on the Florida Sunshine State Standards to guide their curriculum development, and expressed concern about meeting the content objectives.

Five of the seven (H-1, H-3, H-4, H-5, H-7) high school history teachers described their instructional approach as lecture, note taking, discussion, and textbook activities. These five teachers noted that they attempted to occasionally incorporate cooperative learning activities and projects, but usually lectured. For example, teacher H-3 explained that "[my instruction] ends up being what I call 'boring style' – we read a lot of the textbook aloud, copy notes, lecture". Teacher H-4 stated, "I do majority lecture but I try to break that up with reading worksheets and...we do projects."

One teacher (H-6) taught in an alternative high school; she said that, because she had multiple age groups in her classroom, she relied solely on textbook and worksheets without lecture or discussion. Students routinely spent class time independently reading a chapter and completing a review worksheet, a vocabulary worksheet, a skills worksheet, a map worksheet, and then took the textbook-created test. Teacher H-2, on the other hand, claimed to use a variety of instructional approaches, including technology based projects, primary source document activities, cooperative learning activities, and discussion. The high school teachers developed their curriculum from two main sources: the textbook (H-1, H-4, H-7) and the Florida Sunshine State Standards (H-2, H-3, H-4, H-5, H-6).

Adapting instruction and curriculum

The middle school history teachers described similar instructional adaptations for students with disabilities included in their classes. These included: providing copies of class notes (M-2, 5) pairing them with another student (M-3, 5), holding conferences with parents (M-3, 4), and developing IEP recommendations (M-2, 3, 4, 5). Teacher M-1 stated that she went beyond these adaptations, using ability grouping, peer tutoring, and cooperative groups as well as altering her performance expectations and her grading scale for students with disabilities.

> Two teachers expressed resistance to adapting instruction. Teacher M-4 stated: We want them to experience success, but on the other hand we don't want to give them good grades and passing marks for work that is just not going to cut it. We are trying to prepare them for high school so there's a certain amount of 'hey, you need to learn to do this.'

However, he explained that as state law required, he accommodated students with disabilities, adapting instruction according to the recommendations of each student's IEP, meeting with parents, and organizing his class so that students could express their knowledge through art work, conversation, and other formats. Teacher M-5 asserted that "adaptations are insane" and explained that he made the minimum grading scale adjustments required by state law and requested by his special education colleagues.

Teacher M-2 expressed frustration with the amount of time and effort she spent accommodating and adapting her instruction. She explained:

> It's so difficult to try to accommodate students with learning disabilities, handicapped students, students with emotional problems, students with 504 plans – they all seem to have different plans for the kids in a class of 30. Last year I had a kid who could only hear out of one ear and that's a 504 plan. It wasn't a big deal but it's something else to remember when you're changing the seating plan. If the students are identified and have a 504 plan I make special accommodations – from group setting, special testing arrangements,

> there's a whole 3-4 page list. If you have 3-4 kids with 504 plans, different ones, and then you have emotionally handicapped, learning disabled, and really slow learners and you're trying to accommodate them all at the same time you can get into trouble...

Four of the high school teachers (H-1, H-4, H-6, H-7) did not describe any adaptations for students with disabilities. These teachers generally said that they only made changes if students approached them and expressed specific concerns about assignments or lecture notes. Teacher H-4 admitted that while special education paperwork indicated that he had 15 students identified with disabilities included in his classes, he did not know who those students were. Teachers H-1 and H-2 explained that in their high schools, students identified with disabilities enrolled in a learning strategies course in which special education teachers assisted the students with their class work from general education academic subjects. Therefore, if students struggled in their class, teachers H-1 and H-2 notified the learning strategies teacher, who could then provide the students with extra assistance. Teacher H-1 stated that because of the availability of the learning strategies course, he rarely made adaptations in his course. Teacher H-2 explained that, in addition to the learning strategies course, he consulted frequently with the special education teachers, provided students with additional time to meet deadlines, and tutored students during lunchtime.

Three of the high school teachers (H-2, H-3, H-5) described similar methods of adapting instruction, including: extending deadlines for assignments, providing extra time for test-taking, and giving students outlines for note-taking. Teacher H-5 provided the most information on specific adaptations, explaining:

> Legally, you have to [make adaptations]. The things I've done have been relatively simple – allowing extra time to turn in homework assignments but trying to make that subtle so that the student doesn't feel isolated and the other students don't ask for more time or feel that it's unfair. Also, testing in a quiet and sometimes separate environment. And providing students with...preset information for lectures so the student doesn't have to concentrate on writing down [notes] and is actually able to really listen and can circle and underline and participate more.

Views of students with disabilities and inclusion

Middle school history teachers' views towards the abilities of students with disabilities and the concept of inclusion varied widely. For example, teachers M-1 and M-3 explained that they work with all children to the best of their ability and try not to prejudge on the basis of ESE paperwork. Teacher M-1asserted that she refused to "put students into categories" and tried "never to give up on any child." Teacher M-3 stated that some of his best students had disabilities and he "deals with each child individually" in order to help them succeed in his classroom. M-1 and M-3 said that they had never referred a child for special education testing or asked to have a student identified with disabilities removed from their classroom.

Teachers M-2 and M-5 expressed hostility towards the inclusion of students with disabilities. Teacher M-2 asserted that as "an academic teacher, I feel that students should not be thrown into the classroom unless they are prepared." She described several situations in which she worked to have struggling students removed from her classroom. Teacher M-5 said:

> I take issue with the special education industry of labeling kids. A lot of these labels are used by baby-boomers, irresponsible parents to try to explain their kid's problems as though it were the flu. There's a teacher [in my school] who says there shouldn't be special education and inclusion. That's very arrogant, not mainstreaming. But she's so kind and sweet and nice and that hit me like a ton of bricks. She said that if they can't read and write at a junior high level, there should be an alternative setting that meets their needs. Not this band-aid, cut and paste approach in which they're included in social studies and science. If they can't survive in math and language arts, why can they survive in my class? So I thought about this, and that teacher is right -- I am not a mainstreamer. Any more. I hate to track, but I have a system that if a kid shows promise they can be mainstreamed. If [students] show no promise and are problems, put them in another environment. We've all been dragged down.

The high school history teachers generally described their views of students with

disabilities in terms of specific learning disorders and how those disorders affected classroom performance. The majority of these teachers believed the students were quite capable, deserved to be placed in a general education setting, but required extra assistance with reading, writing, organization, and staying on task. Additionally, several of the history teachers noted that many included students lacked historical background knowledge. For example, teacher H-2 noted:

> Some students struggle with reading; they range from low ability to average ability and are quite able to succeed with minor assistance. They have trouble completing work, problems with being organized, problems with understanding complex concepts in history, but overall, it's relatively mild.

One teacher, H5, expressed doubt about the "labeling" of students with disabilities, explaining that "I kind of question to some degree how much labeling is a self-fulfilling prophecy, and they fall back on their diagnosis to use it as an excuse."

Teacher H-2, on the other hand, stated:

> I'm a firm believer in inclusion. I think it should happen everywhere. It doesn't do the kid any good to be in a separate classroom. I like the model of the regular classes and part of the day they meet with somebody so they can have that daily contact. [Inclusion] is much better than if you single them out and they become this identifiable body of kids, 'the dummies". I think inclusion is the way to go.

Contextual Support

Across both groups, contextual support included: provision of volunteer tutors, frequent parent/administrator conferences, assistance from the special education department, and in some instances, a "learning strategies" type of course that students included in the general education setting took. Teacher M-4, for example, explained that his school had a "high level of parental involvement, with about 3 conferences per week. . ., parent and student volunteers, an excellent administration, and a fantastic ESE department." Teacher H-5 noted that ESE teachers provided an excellent source of support, emphasizing that "last year I had a lot of ESE students and literally had a weekly meeting with the ESE people and different individuals who checked on the students. We talked about strategies."

In terms of contextual barriers, teachers listed: overwhelming amounts of paperwork associated with students identified with disabilities placed in the general education history classroom, large class sizes, miscommunication between departments, few opportunities for in-service education regarding inclusion, and the state-mandated Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Teacher M-2, for example, listed excessive paperwork as a barrier to helping students. She explained that "I spend a lot of time filling out forms when I could be making creative lessons." Teacher H-3 noted that her class sizes of 35 and higher precluded her from providing specialized attention to any children, much less students with disabilities. Teacher M-4 stated that he assigned multiple writing assignments because of pressure to prepare students for the FCAT. Large class sizes and large numbers of students included in his general education history class frustrated him, and led to many hours spent on grading. Teacher H-1 complained that the ESE department rarely communicated with general education teachers; he elaborated that "for most of the year the ESE team didn't do a really good job of including regular teachers in IEP meetings and letting us know when the meetings were or documentation of what we're supposed to do." Teacher H-3 had a similar experience; she noted that "at the beginning of the school year the ESE teachers haven't had time to gather all of the information from the previous year to let us know which kids have a disability, so of course those students fell behind until the middle of the school year, when we finally received the IEPs."

Discussion

While this study serves only as an initial exploratory look at the attitudes of secondary history teachers towards inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom, the interview data raise some interesting issues. First, when teachers described their approaches to history instruction and curriculum development, they viewed both of these matters as standard for all children, regardless of ability level. No teachers mentioned the possibility of individualizing or

differentiating history instruction and curriculum to meet the learning needs of students with disabilities. Secondly, in terms of adaptation, teachers made very superficial changes to existing assignments rather than truly "adapting" the assignment or instructional approach. Third, while most teachers were generally positive towards inclusion of students with disabilities, several teachers expressed hostility towards the concept of inclusion and argued that students with learning difficulties should not be in the general education content-area classroom. Because positive teacher beliefs towards inclusion and students with disabilities are a major factor in successful inclusion, this expressed hostility seems troubling. Fourth, the interview data revealed the lack of preparation of history teachers for teaching students with disabilities; half of the teachers had never taken a course in special education. Finally, the issue of contextual support arose in the interview data; the teachers did not appear to receive significant or intensive support for assisting students with disabilities in their history classroom.

While these findings reflect the insights of the special education literature, it is important that discussion of the issue of inclusion move out of the realm of special education and into the social studies. The interview data demonstrates that many students with disabilities in this school district are missing out when it comes to history instruction. Lecture and whole class instruction, which special educators contend is the worst possible teaching approach for students with disabilities, occurred in many classrooms. Even in classrooms where teachers used a variety of creative instructional approaches to teach history, they did not describe meaningful adaptations or curriculum differentiations that would make history more accessible to students with disabilities. Additionally, these teachers did not describe approaches or adaptations that might help students with disabilities to scaffold historical information through structuring activities designed to meet the students' needs, providing assistance in developing the skills necessary to engage in inquiry, or encouraging in-depth understanding of important historical ideas.

Special educators Ferretti, MacArthur, and Okolo (2001) recently conducted a study in which they implemented a strategy-supported project-based historical thinking learning unit in two fifth grade general education classrooms that included several students with mild to moderate learning disabilities. This unit, on westward expansion, involved examining primary sources, investigating historical questions, and constructing historical narrative. In order to reach students with disabilities, the unit also included differentiated curricular goals, heterogeneous grouping, and intensive teaching of the cognitive strategies involved in "doing history"; how to recognize a narrative structure, and how to analyze, interpret, read, and communicate historical information. The researchers found that the implementation of this unit yielded positive outcomes for students with and without disabilities; they argued that "students with disabilities can understand the authentic historical practice and meet the demands of a rigorous curricula" (p. 69). Additionally, the authors asserted that engaging history units of study that teach historical processes promote the critical dispositions students need to participate in a representative democracy. Thus, excluding students with disabilities from meaningful history instruction prevents them from learning how to participate in democratic decision-making. Ferretti, MacArthur, and Okolo's study demonstrates the potential for history teachers to reach students with disabilities and emphasizes the importance of this topic within the social studies community.

This exploratory study illuminates the need for conversation within the social studies field about the issue of inclusion and how it relates to the teaching and learning of history. Additionally, this study demonstrates the potential for more intensive and extensive study of the status of inclusion in history classrooms, history teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards inclusion, and the future role of social studies teacher educators in addressing the needs of social studies teachers entering schools with inclusive practices and increasingly diverse student populations.

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Table Pages

Table 1: Middle School Teachers

Teachers	Demographics	Educational Background	Teaching Experience	Special Education Course?
M-1	Black Female	B.A. History Working on a M.Ed.	14 years	No.
M-2	White Female	B.A. History	22 years	No.
M-3	Black Male	B.S. Public Relations	5 years	Yes.
M-4	White Male	B.A. History M.Ed. Social Studies Education	2 years	Yes.
M-5	White Male	B.A. History M.Ed. Social Studies Education	13 years	Yes.

Table 2: High School Teachers

Teachers	Demographics	Education	Teaching Experience	Special Education Course?
H-1	White Male	B.A./M.A. political science Ed.S. Social Studies Education	4 years	Yes. 2 credit course
H-2	White Male	B.A./M.A. History Ed.S. Social Studies Education	16 years	No
H-3	Black Female	B.S. in Business Economics	1 year	No
H-4	White Male	B.A. History	3 years	No
H-5	White Male	B.A. History M.Ed. Social Studies Education	2 years	Yes. 2 credit course
H-6	White Female	B.A. History Ed.S. Education Ph.D. Curriculum & Instruction	40 years	No.
H-7	White Female	B.A. History M.Ed. Social Studies Education	2 years	Yes. 2 credit course

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SOURCE: J Soc Stud Res 27 no1 Spr 2003
WN: 0310507265004

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